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ABSTRACT

A graduate student internship program in teaching composition at Brigham Young University (Utah) is described. Interns are trained for five advanced English courses: critical and interpretive writing, critical writing for elementary education majors, writing about literature, factual and scientific writing, and technical writing. The first interns were full- and part-time faculty, and now second or third year graduate students serve as interns. Prospective interns register for the course and do the course work. They also begin reading the rhetoric of the particular course and the journals and publications of relevant disciplines. The intern will serve with an experienced and effective professor, and they will have a class of 40-45 students. Together they plan, write the syllabus for, and teach the course. The professor will instruct the intern in the content and rationale of the course and will assist the intern in anticipating student questions and problems. They conference together with students as training for one-on-one conferencing. Ongoing intern supervision and evaluation is part of the training. After interning, the person solos the following semester with a class of 20-25 students, and the professor remains available for consultation and may visit the class. (SW)

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INTEGRATING SUPERVISION, EVALUATION, AND TRAINING:
GRADUATE STUDENT INTERNSHIPS IN TEACHING COMPOSITION

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INTEGRATING SUPERVISION, EVALUATION, AND TRAINING:
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As part of their general education, all students at Brigham Young University must complete seven semester-credit hours of English composition: four in freshman English and three in advanced writing. Students register for the advanced writing course in their junior year, after completing freshman English and after considerable knowledge or experience in the major. Available are five courses designed for the particular needs of students in various major disciplines or colleges:

- (1) English 312, Critical and Interpretive Writing, an advanced composition course in exposition and persuasion, for students in the fine arts and languages.
- (2) English 313, Critical Writing for Elementary Education Majors, an advanced composition course assisting students in their college writing and in the teaching of writing.
- (3) English 314, Writing about Literature, literature-based exposition and research, for majors in English and other languages or literatures.
- (4) English 315, Factual and Scientific Writing, an advanced composition course for students in business and the social sciences.
- (5) English 316, Technical Writing, an advanced composition course for students in biological, engineering and physical sciences.

The 60 full-time faculty in the department of English are not a sufficient number to teach the 75-80 freshman English sections, 45-50 advanced writing sections, and the 120 sections of literature, English language, and creative writing each semester. Consequently, the department employs 20 part-time faculty and approximately 50 Student Instructors (mostly graduate students in English, but also a limited number of graduate students from the School of Law or other disciplines). Student Instructors (TA's) have full responsibility for classes they teach, though they undergo a rather extensive training program with the Director of Composition and her associate director: a three day workshop prior to the start of the school year, a weekly seminar, supervised classroom visits and consultation. Of the total composition program, Student Instructors teach 52% (mostly freshman English); part-time faculty teach 23%; and full-time faculty teach 25% (90% of the advanced writing).

When the "vertical program" began in 1970, the department intended (and the university administration agreed) that only experienced faculty would teach the advanced courses. Staffing English 312 and 314 posed no difficulties; faculty who had been teaching freshman English shifted to the advanced courses and the department expanded its number of graduate Student Instructors. But staffing English 315 and 316 could have been difficult, had the department not benefited from the natural growth its elective technical writing course had undergone between 1962 and 1970. That course had grown from a single section taught by John S. Harris to five or six sections each semester taught by full-time faculty in the department who had learned to teach technical writing under Professor Harris. (See Harris, 1984.)

As Harris had invited interested teachers to sit in as he taught the course and then to teach a class on their own, in the same way others could become familiar with principles and practices needed for the new 315 and an expanded 316 program. Training teachers by internship began. Our first interns were faculty. They would sit in on the class taught by an experienced professor and then teach a class on their own, or we would assign two faculty to team-teach a single class of 40-50 students, the experienced teacher taking the lead and acting as coach. Eventually we accepted part-time faculty, having them sit in on the class one semester, suggesting they write the papers and do the work the students did, and then team-teaching with them the following semester, before they taught on their own. The program evolved gradually, and now we accept a limited number of second or third year graduate students.

The sequence now is rather consistent among the five advanced courses. The person (faculty, part-time faculty, or graduate student) who desires to intern, for instance, in factual and scientific or in technical writing, registers for the course or sits in on the class as if registered. We strongly recommend that prospective interns do the work of the course. In addition, the person begins reading in the rhetoric of the particular course and in the journals and publications of the various disciplines for whom the course is designed. The teacher ought to be more than superficially conversant with subjects students will write on. And the person officially applies to become an intern.

When accepted, the person will intern with an experienced and proven effective professor. They will have a class of 40-45 students. Together, they plan, write the syllabus for, and teach the course. Generally they

divide the work evenly (instruction, assignments, conferencing with students, evaluating student performance), with the professor as leader.

Early in the semester the two will counsel together three times weekly: the professor will instruct the intern in the content and rationale of the course; together they will plan what to teach, who will teach it, and how to teach it. The professor assists the intern in anticipating student questions and problems inherent in concepts or skills and may suggest resources for further study of those concepts. These meetings are sessions in which the two examine all things necessary for effective teaching of the course (stance, concepts, objectives, instruction, interaction, assignments, evaluation of student work, the dynamics of professorship and of scholarship, etc.). Regularly, the two work through a few student papers together to achieve some uniformity of marking and grading. Together they conference with students (two on one) as training for one on one conferencing. They share teaching files and materials freely and develop new materials as needed.

The two regularly interact in the classroom, though each will have primary responsibility for some portion of each day's presentation. And both teachers, of course, compute final grades.

Just as there is ongoing training, so there is ongoing supervision and evaluation. The intern receives praise for activities or instruction that has gone well and assistance for improvement as needed. The doing of things together and doing things on one's own allow each to observe, to clarify, to examine any and all aspects of instruction. In addition, the intern learns ways of seeking information for improvement of performance. At the end of the first four weeks, for instance, they may

ask the students to list on a half sheet of paper three or four things that are working well and three or four things that need improving. Since the comments are to remain anonymous, students are encouraged to be open, even frank, but helpful to both teachers. Such a simple step toward formative evaluation threatens no one, and if repeated again at eight weeks and perhaps again at twelve, summative evaluations required by the director of composition of all student instructors at the end of each semester are taken in stride and even anticipated with confidence. And it is not always the intern who gains from the association; the professor must be in top form always.

After successfully interning, the person solos the following semester with a class of 20-25 students. The professor remains available for consultation, and may visit the intern's class when invited or at unannounced intervals.

The internship serves several purposes: first, the training of good teachers (for us, primarily of writing, though certainly TA's could intern in other disciplines); second, supplying a cadre of experienced teachers to staff classes somewhat inexpensively; third, broadening the training of graduate students while assisting them financially; fourth, building or maintaining somewhat uniform and sound instruction in multiple-section courses; fifth, expanding the graduate's opportunities for employment. And sixth, such mentoring promotes good collegiality.

Reference

- Harris, J. S. (1984). Training teachers of technical writing by internships. In Teaching technical writing: The training of teachers of technical writing. Moorhead, KY: Association of Teachers of Technical Writing Anthology #4.